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L. WEBSTER FOX, M. D., LL. D.
PHILADELPHIA, P. A.

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MASSAGE AS AN OCCUPATION FOR THE BLIND.

L. Webster Fox, M. D., LL. D.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

No longer do we hear the cry of "Pity the poor blind." In these days the blind ask aid to work in order that they may assume their proper position in society. Those who are trained ask us to test their abilities,—and render them our sympathetic and efficacious assistance, but not our alms.

The erroneous idea that physical darkness implied intellectual darkness has long since been disproved and dispelled, for a long list could be given of blind persons who have become famous as travelers, statesmen, authors, poets, mathematicians, musicians and workers in handicrafts of various kinds.

Many are the occupations for which the blind are now being trained, some being of a manual, some of a professional, and some of a literary character. Not a few are in some way engaged in journalism. For instance at the office of the *"Petit Meridional"* of Montpelier, a blind person has charge of the telephone, receiving the news from Paris, which he immediately speaks into a phonograph. He makes the phonograph repeat the record which has been made; he then writes it off with a Remington typewriter, and in that way produces copy for the press. There are at the present time several blind persons in London and New York, at large hotels and factories, who are operating telephone switch boards, and others are reproducing with accuracy on the typewriter material which has been spoken into the phonograph.

Massage, however, seems to be an ideal occupation for the blind, one which is not greatly influenced by the economic changes of the world. It is far from being a new occupation for the blind, as for more than one thousand years it has been practised by them in Japan.

Professor Yoshimoto of Japan, who has been appointed the principal of the Model College for the Blind in Tokio, has recently paid a visit to the United States, and incidentally visited the Medico-Chirurgical Hospital in Philadelphia. He

*Read at the meeting of the American Academy of Ophthalmology and Oto-Laryngology held in New York, October 4, 5, 6, 1909.

is very enthusiastic as to the employment of the blind as masseurs and urges their being trained for that profession. He reports that in Japan the blind masseur has proved very satisfactory and is highly appreciated by doctors and patients. In Japan the majority of the masseurs are blind and almost all the blind are masseurs, and until recently they possessed special privileges in that country. The students spend from three to five years at the schools for the blind. First they obtain a general knowledge of anatomy, physiology and pathology. Then they study minutely massage and the ailments which it cures. In practising massage they use only the hand, so that great attention is paid to improving the sense of touch and the training of the fingers to rapid and skillful movements.

Blind masseurs are used to teach the blind the art of massage.

Professor Yoshimoto tells us that blind masseurs know many ingenious methods by which they can well make up for the deficiency of sight. For example, though the blind cannot see the expression of their patient's faces, they can observe them just as well by lightly feeling certain muscles in the face, and see if their treatment is strong or weak. Indeed practising massage would not be an easy matter at all for the blind in Japan if they did not learn many ingenious methods which have been invented through the joint experiences of many clever blind massageurs.

In Yokohama, with a population of 500,000 souls, there are about 1000 masseurs and masseuses, of whom 400 belong to a corporation, 500 work upon their own account and 100 are sighted persons. In 1906 the Japanese Parliament contemplated making a law which would assure to the blind the monopoly of massage.

The National Institution for Massage for the Blind, which has its headquarters in London, has been rapidly gaining the cordial recognition of the profession and the confidence of the public. There are now more than sixty trained blind operators who are graduates of this Institution. Several during the first year, after completing their training, have earned on an average $400 to $500 a year. Many have found employment in hydrotherapeutic establishments, whilst others have successfully practised massage on their own account.

The work in London is under the presidency of Dr. Mal-

colm McHardy, and such prominent members of the medical profession as Sir Anderson Critchett, Drs. R. Marcus Gunn, Arnold Lawson, William Lang, J. Fletcher Little, etc., are active members of its Board of Managers. These names afford a guarantee of the efficiency of the training which the blind receive in the London Institution. There exists in this institution an inviolable rule that the masseuses shall only treat women and children, and that the masseurs shall only treat men. In other parts of Great Britain, especially in Edinburgh and Manchester, the blind are educated in the art of massage. Similar efforts to train the blind for this occupation have, in recent years, been made with much success on the continent of Europe in Stockholm, Copenhagen, St. Petersburg, Koenigsberg, Brunswick, Frankfort, Berlin, Liepzig, Kiel, Nuremberg, Brussels, Paris, Lyons and Lille, and in this country in New York, Boston and Philadelphia. At the Orthopedic Hospital in Philadelphia, where the department was instituted by the distinguished Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, systematic instruction in massage has been given to several blind persons. Fourteen of both sexes have been already graduated from this Hospital, and they have been more or less successful in practising the art.

In a previous paper on "Massage as an Occupation for the Blind," I have emphasized the importance of the most thorough training of the blind for practising massage. They should be healthly, well informed individuals,—they should possess refinement of manner, should have good moral habits; the breath should be irreproachable, and the hands should be well formed and smooth, being neither too fat nor too thin, and above all things, not moist.

Where the blind graduates in massage have been given an opportunity to show their ability, the results have proved very satisfactory, and it has been found that the blind can perform as good work as their sighted colleagues, and in some cases their blindness makes them even more acceptable.

As yet the number of the blind prepared to practise the art in this country is comparatively small, and the members of the medical profession have not realized what a blessing they would confer upon their sightless friends if they encouraged their patients to employ blind operators.

For the blind to succeed in this occupation they must have the

support of the medical profession and then their patients will receive the blind massageur with pleasure. It is to be hoped that all those who are interested in helping the blind to help themselves will do their utmost to recommend the employment of the blind as masseurs and masseuses, and give the operators an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to perform the manipulations with the same skill as their sighted competitors.

Massage, whilst being a new field of labor open to the blind in this country, ought to be an ever-widening one as surgeons and physicians come to appreciate its value and application as a therapeutic measure.

The New York Association for the Blind, which is carrying on a most admirable work at 118 E. 59th Street, at one time set apart an office for the treatment of massage by a skilled blind masseur, who was graduated from the Institution for the Blind at Overbrook, Pennsylvania, and was afterwards trained for massage at the Orthopaedic Hospital in Philadelphia, Pa. The office was not much patronized and the room has recently been used for other purposes. I learn through Miss Winifred Holt, the gifted and indefatigable Secretary of the New York Association for the Blind, that it has been a disappointment that so little progress has been made with the public in inducing it to employ blind masseurs. However, it is gratifying to learn that a young masseuse, in whom the officials of the New York Association are interested, is meeting with considerable success in that city. She lost her sight five years ago, and took up massage as an employment. The doctors for whom she works, among them two at St. Luke's Hospital in New York, speak of her ability in the highest terms. One of the smaller hospitals in the city being desirous of giving lectures on massage to the nurses in the Institution, has engaged this young woman to give this course.

In a previous paper I referred to Mr. William J. Nealon of Philadelphia, who lost his eyesight on the eve of his being graduated as a Doctor of Medicine. He studied massage, for which his anatomical and medical knowledge particularly fitted him, and he is still successfully and acceptably practising his art in Philadelphia, and is officially attached as Masseur in Chief to the Howard Hospital. He also practises massage in St. Agnes' Hospital.

These two instances illustrate the ability of the blind to administer this valuable adjunct to medical and surgical treatment, but it is as yet a novelty to the profession and to the public in this country. The time is, however, at hand, we believe, when the Superintendents of Hospitals and Sanitaria, as well as the members of the profession generally, will realize that the blind can be as thoroughly trained, and can as efficiently administer massage, as any sighted person.

It seems to me that if this work is to prosper in this country, it must be carried on as in London, directly under the auspices and fostering care of members of our profession. In England several physicians have announced that they will employ no other than blind masseurs for their patients, as their delicacy of touch enables them oftentimes to detect structural changes which are not appreciated by the sighted.

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